

Garments of Grace: Clothing Imagery in the Bible

The Wedding Garment

Lesson #11 for June 11, 2011

Scriptures: Matthew 21; 22:1-14; Revelation 21:2,9; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Daniel 7:10; Genesis 3:9-19.

1. This lesson is an in-depth study of Matthew 22:1-14—the parable of the wedding of the king’s son, those who refused to come, those who finally came, and the man who was thrown out.
2. The major questions we need to address are the following: 1) Who got into the wedding? and, 2) Who had a wedding garment on? While the setting is the same for these two questions—the wedding supper for the king’s son—they are, in fact, two different parables.
3. Anyone who has studied Christian history knows that it has not always been a pretty picture. If it had been, we would have been in the kingdom long before this. There are a number of parables in the Bible talking about how God will distinguish between the good people and the bad people at the end-time judgment. Matthew 25 has several of them! See also Matthew 13:24-30 and our parable for this week, Matthew 22:1-14. But, how will God actually go about making that judgment? And perhaps more important to us right now, can we distinguish whether or not we have the true wedding garment on?
4. Consider the following:

The guests at the gospel feast are those who profess to serve God, those whose names are written in the book of life. But not all who profess to be Christians are true disciples. Before the final reward is given, it must be decided who are fitted to share the inheritance of the righteous. This decision must be made prior to the second coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven; for when He comes, His reward is with Him, “to give every man according as his work shall be.” Revelation 22:12. Before His coming, then, the character of every man’s work will have been determined, and to every one of Christ’s followers the reward will have been apportioned according to his deeds. —Ellen G White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 310.

5. Christ’s last few days in Jerusalem were filled with challenges, contrasts, and exciting events from the triumphal entry to Jesus’ final departure from the temple.
6. The Sadducees and Pharisees were great debaters. They had come up with questions which they considered to be virtually unanswerable. They brought some of those questions to Jesus, and He immediately answered them in ways that were so obviously correct that no one could challenge Him. Then, He began to ask them questions. He told the parable of the two sons, (Matthew 21:28-32) and then the parable of the tenets in the vineyard. (Matthew 21:33-44) Incredibly, they knew He was talking about them, but there was nothing they could use in His words to try to get back at Him.
7. Another very fascinating aspect of this time period was that Jesus apparently arrived at the temple early in the morning; and almost immediately, He was surrounded by eager crowds who wanted to hear Him and to be healed by Him. These crowds prevented the scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees from taking action against Him as they would like to have because these religious leaders were afraid of the people themselves!
8. Turn now to Matthew 22:1-14. The first part of this parable is quite puzzling. Why is it that the invited guests had no interest in coming to the wedding feast of the king’s son? This must surely imply that the king was not held in high regard. Obviously, they did not appreciate him

or his ruling style. Why else would they have killed his servants? Perhaps, his ruling style was correctly represented by Matthew 22:7 where it says that he became very angry, sent his soldiers, killed those murderers, and burned down their city. Surely, our God is not correctly represented by such a king! The original invitees clearly believed that almost any excuse was good enough to avoid coming to the wedding feast. Wedding feasts, especially for sons of kings, should be glorious, joyous, and happy occasions. But obviously, this one was preceded by violence, murder, and the destruction of an entire city.

9. What the king did next is almost shocking. He sent his servants out into the streets to “compel”—some versions say “invite”—anyone they could find to come to the wedding feast. Once again, we note that this is not an accurate representation of God’s plan of salvation.

In the work of redemption there is no compulsion. No external force is employed. Under the influence of the Spirit of God, man is left free to choose whom he will serve. In the change that takes place when the soul surrenders to Christ, there is the highest sense of freedom. The expulsion of sin is the act of the soul itself. True, we have no power to free ourselves from Satan’s control; but when we desire to be set free from sin, and in our great need cry out for a power out of and above ourselves, the powers of the soul are imbued with the divine energy of the Holy Spirit, and they obey the dictates of the will in fulfilling the will of God.—Ellen G White, *Desire of Ages* p. 466.4

10. It is also interesting to note that there is a similar parable found in Luke 14:15-24, but the conditions are somewhat different. Why do you think there are these differences? Did one author forget the details? Or, could these be two different occasions reported in the Gospels? The Gospel of Luke leaves out the details about the wedding garment.
11. After reading Matthew 22:1-14, what do you think of the excuses made by the original invitees? Are they similar to the excuses made in Luke 14? Were these excuses the real reasons why they did not want to come to this king’s son’s wedding? Or, were these just that? Excuses.
12. In comparing these parable with the parables in Matthew 21, we remember that Jesus came to be the true King of the Jews. He was welcomed by many of the people but rejected by the Jewish leaders. Everyone was invited to be a part of His kingdom. But, those who considered themselves to be authorities rejected Him.
13. The king, of course, said that they were not willing to come and, therefore, were not welcome because they were not worthy. Do you think the people who were compelled to come in from off the streets were worthy? As Christians can we make ourselves worthy? What do we have to do to become worthy? If this is a free offer from the king? Why are we talking about being worthy?
14. Our Bible study guide goes to considerable lengths to make it clear that God’s gift of salvation is free; it was purchased on our behalf by the death of Jesus which pays the price for our sins. In what sense does His sinless life cover our sinful lives? And in what sense is it free? It cost the kingdom of heaven and God Himself everything! And while it is offered freely to us, there are strings attached! Do we believe that it is truly free and there are no strings attached? If there were absolutely no strings attached, wouldn’t everyone in the world accept it?
15. Read Matthew 22:9-14. There are three interesting points in these verses. First of all, it says they gathered in “good and bad alike.” This should not be surprising since they were compelling people to come in off the streets. Apparently, free wedding garments were offered to everyone as they entered the king’s palace. But, then the king went around and

found one man not wearing the appropriate wedding attire. After quizzing him and discovering the man had no excuse, he was thrown out where there was crying and “grinding of teeth.” If the parable stopped there, we would be inclined to believe that this was a rare occurrence. However, in Matthew 22:14, Jesus concluded, “Many are invited, but few are chosen.” Does this imply that the majority of those who were compelled to come were actually thrown out? Clearly, one of the strings attached to this compulsive, free invitation was that the guest had to wear the wedding garment. What possible reason could there be for not wearing a “free” wedding garment? What reason do people—even those claiming to be Christians—give for not fully and completely following Jesus Christ in our day?

16. Considering what the Christian church is supposed to be, some have suggested that it is “not a club for saints but a hospital for sinners.” Unfortunately, in this hospital there are some of the meanest, nastiest, most hateful people you can imagine. Many believe that they are called upon to be judgmental, condemnatory, critical, and truly downright evil in their attitude toward others who want to be Christians.
17. In the ongoing conflict of ideas between Christians and Muslims, Muslims will frequently refer back almost one thousand years to the stories of the crusaders. Although their intentions may have originally been good, the crusaders stormed through the Middle East pillaging and destroying, plundering and killing virtually everyone in their path. “One eyewitness reported that ‘our troops boiled pagan adults in cooking pots. The impaled children on spits and devoured them grilled.’” (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* for June 7, 2011) Were those true Christian behaviors? We, of course, were not there! We do not know what caused them to do those things. And, we do not know if later they repented of their actions.
18. But, if there is going to be some kind of separation between the “sheep” and the “goats,” (Matthew 25:31-46) God must fairly judge everyone at some point. (Romans 14:10; Hebrews 10:30; Ecclesiastes 12:14; Daniel 7:9,10; Revelation 20:12; Matthew 25:31-46)
19. Several basic doctrines are important for a correct understanding of this lesson: 1) The truth about the nature of man. Man is not immortal. When he dies, he is just “asleep.” 2) The great controversy over God’s character and government is an essential part of the puzzle as well. If one believes in the once-saved-always-saved doctrine, this lesson poses a number of problems.
20. Seventh-day Adventists believe that when people die, they do not go immediately to either heaven or hell. Scriptures teach that the dead are sleeping, (John 11) awaiting a day of judgment prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ. This judgment is sometimes called the investigative judgment but would be more correctly called the pre-advent judgment. We believe that that judgment is going on right now—having begun in 1844 and continuing until just before Christ appears.
21. Of course, God has called people to be His special people in the past. Abraham was called to be the father of many nations and to be a blessing to the Gentiles. (Genesis 12:1-3) Later, that promise was repeated to Isaac and Jacob. It was repeated to the entire nation of Israel at Mount Sinai. (Exodus 19:5,6) But, something terrible happened. Through the rest of the Old Testament, we find that few people appeared willing to accept God’s call. And when Jesus came in the times of the New Testament, they not only rejected Him as a nation but also determined to kill Him and so arranged for His crucifixion.
22. So, what is involved in accepting God’s offer? Jesus makes it clear that this will lead to obedience which, in turn, will lead to a transformation of character and, ultimately, to salvation which means healing. This is not a take-it-or-leave-it, free offer; but rather, it is a total commitment.
23. What is the purpose of such a pre-advent judgment? If God intends to separate the true and

faithful from sinners at the end, clearly, there must be some kind of judgment. If God Himself is omniscient, He certainly knows already who should be saved and who cannot be saved. But, the rest of the universe does not have that information or this knowledge. So, for Seventh-day Adventists who believe in the great controversy, this is an opportunity, first of all, to demonstrate that God is completely fair in His judgments; and further, to show that each one of us will be judged fairly. In the great controversy, before God can re-create the heavens and the earth, everyone who has ever lived—including the Devil himself—will bow and agree that God has been completely fair and that God has done the very best He could have for each individual. (Isaiah 45:23; Romans 14:10; Philippians 2:10,11)

24. So, how does God conduct His pre-advent judgment? First of all, we must note that it is done in a completely open manner with the entire universe watching. (Daniel 7:9,10) The question which arises for us is this: While God can clearly distinguish between those who are safe to save and those who are not, is it possible for us to know the truth even about ourselves?
25. Creatures, including fallen angels and human beings, have demonstrated that they are incredibly skilled at deceiving themselves. There will be those who will show up at the final judgment claiming that they should be saved; but God will say, “No.” (Matthew 7:21-23)
26. This parable about the wedding garment and the man who did not have one, only makes sense if the wedding garments are provided free by the king. In the comment on Matthew 22:11, Volume 5 of the *SDA Bible Commentary* says that this is the case. Is there any evidence from Scripture itself that this is the case?
27. Paul asserted in 1 Corinthians 1:30 that the gift which God gives us is not just a robe to provide a covering. We receive from Him wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. As we suggested earlier, this is a total transformation.
28. So, what does it cost us to accept the robe of Christ’s righteousness? Read Philippians 3:1-10. In this passage Paul said that he was putting everything on the line. All his heritage, his Jewish upbringing and training, everything that in the past he believed would lead to his salvation, really counted as refuse. All of that “personal righteousness” is useless, and he claimed only the right to share in Christ’s righteousness based on faith. All he wanted was to know Christ, to experience His resurrection, to share in His sufferings, and to become like Him in His death, hoping, of course, that he will be raised from death to life. Clearly, this is not a casual, take-it-or-leave-it, free gift. In John 15 Jesus Himself suggested that this relationship must be an abiding in the vine. This is, or at least should be, a permanent arrangement.
29. In the judgment that we have been talking about, it is clear that God will bring not only our words and our actions into the judgment but also even our secret thoughts and motives. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 1 Corinthians 4:5; Matthew 22:11; Revelation 20:12) When the judgment is all over, can you think of any reason why God should not be fully and completely trusted? Even the onlooking universe will come to a new appreciation of God because of what He has done to save sinners.
30. Most of us recognize that popular Christianity is just that: popular. Mega-churches have sprung up in many places, and the church has become a stylish club. High salaries are paid for motivational pastors. Fashionable sins are not touched. These churches are not the place for self-denying Christians. It is hard to know how God will honestly judge them. (*Great Controversy*, p. 386.)

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Last Modified: May 1, 2011

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